CHAPTER 6

# SENSORY SCREENS, DIGITIZED DESIRES

## *Dancing Rasa from Bombay Cinema to Reality TV*

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THE evolution of Indian dances on screen emerged in Bombay cinema within the dialectic between tradition and modernity.[1] From its inception, Bombay cinema embraced the centrality of music, dance, ritual, and festivals in Indian life, and encapsulated these moments through song and dance sequences. The contemporary popularity of song and dance sequences in Bollywood films (Bombay cinema was renamed Bollywood in the 1980s) is a continuation of this negotiation. In the contemporary context, however, new incarnations of song and dance sequences are no longer bound up with films; their byproducts, such as music videos and dance reality television, instead lead autonomous lives. The relationship between Bombay film dance or Bollywood dance and dance reality shows is a story of the long and complex history of screendance in India. Thus while dance television reality shows in India are conceptually borrowed from television reality shows in the West, they are deeply grounded in the visual and sensory culture of India and its all-pervasive media apparatus, Bombay/Bollywood films.

In this essay, I am interested in investigating this indigenous logic of visual genre by placing the dance reality shows within the same "interocular field" as the song and dance sequences in Bombay/Bollywood films.[2] I will argue that the song and dance sequences in Bombay films were forerunners of the music video industry as well as music and dance reality TV. This is true for both the west and the east (that is, Hollywood and Bollywood). Moreover, the connections between the west and east are both narratives of homogenization of cultural products and specificities of culture and aesthetics.[3] However, my analysis here will be limited to the aesthetic realm of the song and dance sequences in Bombay/Bollywood films and will not include their history, economics, and production, or their relationship to the larger media industries such as television and music videos.

The intersections of modern media—such as cinema, television, and music videos—with older traditions of music, dance, and theater are complex areas of investigation where several overlapping spheres of meaning are simultaneously at play. In the modern age of mechanical reproduction, the visual aesthetics of the past—which were derived from Indian philosophical, religious, and secular traditions—entangle with modern technologies of imaging such as photography, cinema, television, and various electronic media. The media explosion of screen dances in India draws from this rich history of aesthetics and forms a diverse tapestry of lives, desires, aspirations, and experiences of dancers, choreographers, and spectators. In order to uncover the myriad aesthetics of screen dances within a mediatized global Indian modernity, I will explore the conceptual framework of "desire" and its relation to nation and citizen as they are articulated in the song and dance sequences of Bombay films. The search for a new aesthetic modernity in India, I argue, takes shape in the construction of "desire" and the "desiring subject," as well as in negotiating the embodied aesthetics of the past with modern technology. Here "desire" is not just encoded as image or representation (theorized in film scholarship as cinematic gaze) but also as lived emotion and corporeal experiences.[4]

The chapter is divided in three sections. In the first section, "desire" is the theoretical lens through which I explore song and dance sequences as aspects of both aesthetic and material desire in shaping the citizen subject. The second section maps the transition from Bombay to Bollywood films by analyzing some of the key song and dance sequences; in this way, I establish a genealogical link between the television reality shows and the song and dance sequences in Bollywood films. The third section situates the song and dance sequences in the context of reality TV and its derivative, Bollywood aesthetics, packaged in "item numbers." The broadening of the dance context due to the rise of new media, especially reality TV, I argue, has allowed women and men from underprivileged classes to aspire to and acquire public visibility by participating in dance reality shows. This has led to a new kind of media citizenry. Ultimately, I suggest that the transition of screen dances from Bombay to Bollywood is not just an aesthetic cinematic transformation but is located in the ideological and material transformation of "desire" and the "desiring subject" within the changing narrative of Indian modernity.

## The Desiring Subject and Song and Dance in Bombay Films

In Indian philosophy, religion, and art, "desire" forms the common ground for exploring human emotions and feelings. The idea of desire is transformed into aesthetic emotions such as *bhava* (mood and feeling or everyday emotion) and *rasa* (aesthetic or sublime emotion) in the performing and visual arts. "Desire" as articulated and

embodied through the songs and dances in Bombay films of the past (before they became Bollywood films) belonged to the mythopoetic world of *bhakti* and *sufi* love mysticism.[5] This music and these dances were imbued with *rasa* such as *bhakti rasa*, or devotional desire, and *sringara rasa*, or erotic desire.[6] Although many of the song and dance sequences were influenced by Uday Shankar, who gave a new dimension to the classical *rasa* aesthetics, and some were derived purely from western forms (to be discussed in the next section), the general repertoire of the song and dances were associated with traditional Indian aesthetics. It is no surprise then that dance has been an important feature of Bombay cinema from its inception. Film and dance have both been integral to the project of nation building and fostering a sense of collective national identity. Both have used similar cultural and aesthetic codes of the *rasas* for meaning-making, affect, and identity construction for establishing a deep sense of cultural identity. Classical and folk dances ranging from *kathak* and *bharatanatyam* to *nautanki* and *raslila* have been the staple of Bombay films.

In Hindi films such as *Devdas, Guide, Pyaasa, Kinara*, and others, the soul's longing for the union with the divine was imagined in the song and dance sequences that expressed a lover's desire for his beloved. These sequences often evoked images of Hindu deities Radha and Krishna or the Persian mystical characters Laila and Majnu, transforming the screen to a mythic land of love mysticism. The songs and dances connected the audience to the cultural habitus of deeply felt emotions encoded in *bhava* and *rasa*. They helped to invent a sense of tradition and continuity in the narrative of nation and identity within a postcolonial context of nation building and citizenship. These dances and songs resonated with the ethos of *parampara* (continuous tradition) that referred to a specific method of dance practice, social organization, and transmission of knowledge. Many films directly incorporated this special training relationship between student and teacher (known as the *guru-shishya parampara*) into their plot. Important films such as *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje, Ganga Jamuna, Surasangam, Shankar Varnam*, and *Umrao Jan* show this specific practice-oriented disciplining of the body in narrating stories of dancers and musicians.

In the last two decades in India, due to globalization, new technology, and the democratization of consumption, a decentralized and fragmented visual field of images has replaced an earlier aesthetic cultural identity. The embodiment of erotic desire through music and dance such as *sringara rasa*, encapsulated in *chherchhar* (flirtatious playfulness in the songs and dances) has transformed into a new kind of desire. It has reshaped the erotic desire of *sringara rasa* to a new sexual and erotic emotion. Bombay cinema, now called Bollywood, has created some stunning images of dance through digital technology, costumes, sets, and dance techniques. Bollywood songs and dances have pushed the commodification of images of dance and dancing bodies to new material and aesthetic dimensions of desire and sexuality. This new kind of desire and emotion is identified with aspirations, markets, and consumption. I propose that the idea of "remix" captures this new aesthetics and lived reality of Bollywood dance. "Remix" as a cultural practice and aesthetic concept represents the new kind of desire associated with markets and commodities (remix is associated with DJ's mixing various

musical tracks to create new hybrid forms). In this new form of dance practice, high and low, classical and folk, Indian and other cultural forms mishmash to produce endless hybridity.[7]

The song and dance sequences recently reinvented as "item numbers" offer myriad possibilities for the heightened desire and aspiration to be a contemporary Indian and a global consumer in an ever-expanding visual field. The songs and dance sequences or "item numbers" are the sites of this contestation of desire between the past aesthetic codes associated with classical and folk dances, and the new ones from MTV, Broadway musicals, music videos, and postmodern choreographies. Simply put, Bollywood song and dance sequences are the quintessential locus of the complex negotiation between India's past and its desire to be a modern democracy and to stake a claim in the global cultural market. Bollywood songs and dances are thus sites of change for ushering in new imaginings of culture, power, democracy, and citizenship.

In the past two decades, a paradigm shift has taken place in the musical, visual, and kinesthetic content of the song and dance sequences that has challenged, even overturned, the established norms, codes, and meanings. Earlier codes, predominantly drawn from the mythopoetic semiotic world of *bhakti* and *sufi* love-mysticism, have given away to gyrating bodies endlessly on display, creating overtly sexualized commodity transactions. The latter roles, once only reserved for "vamps" (played by Helen or Nadira in the past), are now played by lead heroines.[8] As the song and dance sequences have taken on a new format and movement idiom, they have increasingly been dissociated from the plot. Consequently, more value has been added to their commodity status. They now create the "repeat value" of a film and circulate as music videos and "item numbers" on television channels, iTunes, and YouTube. They function like franchise production units, transforming the notion of cultural production into the notion of a rhizomatic culture, where one product leads to other kinds of merchandise. The rise of multiplexes as production houses in urban centers in India is an aspect of the same rhyzomatic multiplications.[9]

Both reality shows and the song and dance sequences in Bollywood capture this new global Indian modernity, perceptible through a mediatized, digitized, and commodified habitus. These "item numbers" produce a sharpening of desire that is perpetuated thorough hypervisualization of images formulated through "commodity aesthetics" associated with eroticism and advertising.[10] Bollywood song and dances sequences and their extensions (music videos and reality shows), I argue, create a potent engine for producing this kind of aesthetic desire that leads to consumption. The emergence of "item numbers" (discussed later) builds on "commodity aesthetics" to produce new heights of desire through the production of "aspirational images." These remixed "item numbers" constitute the new global and cosmopolitan Indian who has no easily identifiable citizenship, no localized identity, nor any familial ties. The "aspirational images" help in branding products and heighten the concept of "commodity aesthetics." As a result, they create the desire not only to consume or buy a product but also expand it to include certain lifestyles or geographical areas. As William Mazzarella explains:

> The statement that objects or images may be "aspirational" implies that an orientation toward such objects or images indicates a desire for personal transformation, in line with a widely diffused and thus generally recognized index of advancement. Aspirational qualities appear, on the face of it, to be inherent properties.[11]

This form of aspirational desire of a new generation of Indians, I argue, is writ large on the song and dance canvas of recent Bollywood films such as *Dhoom 2* and *Don 2* (note the franchising and commodification inherent in the "2" in the titles). The trajectory of "desire" from *rasa* to "remix" is contradictory and complicated as traditional ways of doing things give way to expanding markets and technological innovations summarized often as the "Bollywoodization" of Indian culture.[12] In the next section, I mine the song and dance sequences of Bombay films to create this genealogical link between Bombay cinema, Bollywood films, and dance reality shows. I analyze selected significant song and dance sequences in Bombay/Bollywood films to map their evolution from *filmi nach* or film dance (associated with Bombay cinema) to "item number" (associated with Bollywood films).

## Bombay *Filmi Nach* to Bollywood Dance

The kind of staging, lighting, sets, dancing, music, and choreography that became identified as the Bombay film song and dance sequence represented a paradigm shift in the history of the modernization of Indian dance and music. It is in Indian film dances that the idea of choreography (a concept used in Euro-American dances for organizing space) was indigenized and Indianzied. The screen, camera, and lighting provided the main thrust for this process of re-imagination of dance. Innovation in Indian dances coming out of the temple and court traditions was focused on "time" involving *tala* (rhythm) and *laya* (tempo) rather than "space" and choreographic concepts. In fact, the word "choreography" was seldom used in the past and its popularity today is an aspect of global dance parlance imported from the west. However, Bombay films were instrumental in giving birth to a new genre of dance that used space and time to mark a new Indian form that departed from the usual discourse surrounding classicism. This form celebrated hybridity rather than the narratives of purity and nationhood associated with the revival of classical Indian dances.[13] However, early filmmakers argued that the ubiquitous presence of song and dance in Bombay films was a vehicle for indigenous self-expression, so as to keep the cultural domination of foreign influences at bay. The song and dance sequences during this time drew on traditional and regional folk theater and dance forms such as *raslila, nautanki, jatra,* and *tamasha* to welcome a hybridization of narrative technique. The ingredients also included classical Sanskrit plays (like those of Kalidasa dating back to the fifth century CE.[14]

The mixture of moods and emotions at the core of popular Hindi cinema was an extension of these classical aesthetics encoded in the *navarasa* (nine rasas) discussed in the famous dance and drama treatise *Natyashastra*.[15] But at the same time, the spectacle and the song picturization connected the song and dance sequences to preexisting theatrical forms in colonial India such as Parsi theater. Kathryn Hansen has written about Parsi theater and its propensity to consolidate disparate local performances into a pan-Indian style.[16] Gopal and Moorti explain that the emphasis on spectacle and song in conjunction with an enduring connection to older genres created a new aesthetic of the "modern."[17] A good example of this movement across genre and media is the film *Indrasabha*, which was based on a printed text (a play) that became one of the first talkies.[18]

The first sound film in India, *Alam Ara* (1931) by Ardeshir Irani, successfully blended music, song, and dance as central aspects of the film. Like *Indrasabha*, it too was a popular fantasy play turned into cinema. The play was written by Joseph David and the film was an international venture. In the 25-year jubilee souvenir collection of the magazine *Indian Talkie* (1931–1956) published by the Film Federation of India, the release of *Alam Ara* (1931) was described as the birth cry of the talkie. The film was replete with song and dance sequences; its advertisement read "All Talking Singing Dancing." But the transition from silent to talkie was not without struggle. Especially the performance of song and dance taken from staged products to their representation on screen was seen as a loss in one dimension but a gain in editing and manipulation. K.N. Dandayudapani discusses the technique in the souvenir of *Indian Talkie*, observing, "Initially the music directors had to compress the song into one of three-minute duration without the loss of its charm and emotional appeal; the dance director then rehearsed the artist, choosing the movements and gestures and it had to be rendered piece by piece."[19] The film was shot on the single Tanar system camera that recorded both image and sound simultaneously, a technical feature that restricts flexibility of composition of the scene. This problem was rectified in *Indrasabha* by J.J Madan, a year later.[20] By then *Alam Ara* had proved that talkies had come to stay in India.

The first director and choreographer who revolutionized dancing on screen and merged cinematography with choreography was the modern dance pioneer Uday Shankar, in his film *Kalpana* (1948). The film was shot at Gemini studio and was written, directed, and produced by Uday Shankar. It starred Amala Shankar (Uday Shankar's wife), the Russian ballerina Simkie, and Padmini, a dancer who made her film debut in *Kalpana*. *Kalpana* was groundbreaking for giving a cinematic treatment to the traditional dances of India. Uday Shankar reinvented the *rasa* aesthetics with a view for the camera. Uday Shankar's novel approach to dancing for the camera required a complete readjustment of dance movements but without compromising its embodied aesthetics. In addition, for the first time in Hindi films, the male protagonist was imagined as a dancer. The advertisements for the films in the late 1940s in the magazine *Film India* read: "A feast of music, melodrama, and dance in a story that touches you to the core."[21] Despite its tepid reception in the box office, the reviews were full of excitement. In the same magazine, in an article titled "*Kalpana* Is An Artist's Dream in Celluloid," the

reviewer wrote: "The dream of love, the labour and machine ballet, the spring festival of dances . . . these are the highlights that would have done honour to the most experienced film director . . . Shantarams, Nitin Boses and Mehboobs."[22]

*Kalpana* displayed the indigenous heterogeneity of Indian dances (both classical and folk) to weave a collage of sensuous images. For the first time, Indians witnessed the wealth of their dance traditions from r*ajasthani* folk to *kathakali*. The film introduced to Indian dance the idea of choreography, staging, and movement, designed specifically for the camera. The imaginative camera use and cinematography were striking in the ways that they split the screen to bring into focus both the dancing body and the drumming hands, establishing the intimate and interdependent sensory relationship between dance and music in Indian aesthetics.

Uday Shankar's use of stage sets and lighting created an aesthetic context for both dance and films that was completely new and modern in India. The famous labor and machine sequence was stunning in the way it cohered the movements of the machine with human movements and produced a commentary on the mechanization of humans. This somber sequence contrasted with a scene of spring that celebrated India's diversity by employing various folk songs with dances. Using drums as stage props, we saw dancers unexpectedly springing out of drums (a scene repeated and made famous in the hit film *Chandralekha*). Indonesian Gamelan enhanced the strong musicality of the dance sequences. The unusual lyrical quality of *Kalpana* rendered it a kind of performed poetry rather than a conventional story. Despite the limitations of the drama and acting, the film created a rhythmic coherence of juxtaposition of shots, scenes, and sequences. Incidentally, Uday Shankar's exploration of "semi-expressionist angles and chiaroscuro effects . . . become[s] a model for the dream sequence in later movies such as *Awara* by director Raj Kapoor.' "[23] Simkie, the Russian ballerina from Uday Shankar's troupe, choreographed for this film.

Shankar's influence on Hindi films is a topic that needs to be analyzed further. Suffice it to say here that German Expressionism and chiaroscuro effects via Uday Shankar permeated the work of Bombay film directors such as Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt. Kalpana became the engine for modern Indian dance, rejecting some of the puritanism associated with the revival of classical Indian dance.

*Chandralekha* (1948), directed by S.S Vasan, was another iconic film that created cinematic spectacle through its music and dance sequences. However, unlike *Kalpana*, the main goal of the film was pure entertainment rather than artistic experimentation. The choreography in *Chadralekha* established a new aesthetic of visual vistas, spatial arrangements, and collective movements that was influenced by *Kalpana* but with a difference. The choreography needed to be viewed from a distance, emphasizing the use of long shots. The fusing of dance choreography and cinematography in *Chandralekha* created a dimension for screen dances that no longer abided by the emotional intimacy of *rasa* aesthetics. The packaging of the drama, action (sword fight), thrills (circus sequence), orchestral music, and spectacle (dance) into a narrative extravaganza provided a new entertainment style to Bombay films. *Chandralekha* was a huge commercial success and was the first film to get an all-India distribution.

A Bombay film that was saturated with spectacular song and dance sequences and was a mega hit was *Jhank Jhanak Payal Baje* (1955), directed by V. Shantaram. It was shot in Technicolor and starred Kathak exponent Gopi Krishna and director Shantaram's dancer wife Sandhya. The story was based on two people who were in love with each other and the classical arts. The choreography by Gopi Krishna mostly drew on the traditional *kathak* repertoire. Vasant Desai composed the music and the lyrics were by poet Hazrat Jaipuri. In a song and dance sequence, Shantaram highlighted the *tandava* (powerful dancing associated with the Hindu deity Shiva) by Gopi Krishna; his leaps, footwork, and lightning spins created the melodrama of *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje*.[24] A song and dance sequence based on Radha Krishna *chherchhar* (flirtatious playfulness) connected the film indelibly to the *kathak* repertoire. The *kathak bols* (mnemonic syllables), the *kavits* (poetry), the *gopinis* (the cowherd girls), and Radha and Krishna dancing their divine dance all evoked the sensibility of a staged classical dance drama in a mythic landscape (the film belongs to the Hindi mythological film genre).

The innovative song and dance sequences in Bombay films such as *Jhanak Jhanak Payel Baje* and *Chandralekha* generated public interest in the classical dances during the 1940s and 1950s, just as Uday Shankar had hoped with his film *Kalpana*. The films discussed so far charted a national imagery of classical beauty, mythic love, and idealized landscape: In the words of Christopher Pinney they evoked "a more 'subliminal' and more 'innocent' depiction of an idealized nationspace."[25]—one could argue a national space awash in tradition and culture.

On the other hand, the movies by Wadia Movie Tone such as *Diamond Queen* etched a different nationalist image. The film departed from essentialist ideas of a national tradition to a more inclusive and hybrid model of Indian modernity. [26] Madhurika, the heroine in *Diamond Queen*, was played by Nadia. Trained in ballet, she was from Australia (but of Greek ethnicity), and was originally named Mary Evans. She became the most famous stuntwoman in Bombay films. She was identified as a Bombaywali (a resident of Bombay), a model of cosmopolitan Indian identity in the film.[27] In films such as *Howrah Bridge* (1958), Helen, another Bombay film actress of foreign descent (in this case Anglo-Burmese) was an iconic dance figure of cosmopolitanism. Although in the film she was the anti-heroine or promiscuous dancer vamp, she is Bollywood's original "item girl" (to be discussed later). Her famous dance in the film *Howrah Bridge*, "Mera Naam Chinchinchu," which was sung by Geeta Dutt, was a landmark sequence of both Madhurika's dancing and an imagining of transnational national space. The setting was a café in Calcutta, which represented a transnational node for people from Burma, China, England, and India. The choreography was a medley of different Western dances, especially from the Swing era in America. The backup dancers executed with ease the partnering and steps associated with swing. The choreography was by Surya Kumar, who belonged to a group of choreographers in Bombay who were adept at *kathak* dance and western ballroom styles. Jay Borade, the choreographer of the film Hum *Apke Hai Kaun* (*Who Am I to You?*, which I discuss later), worked as Kumar's assistant for a long time.

Another significant example of a Western cosmopolitan medley of shake and shimmy was *Teesri Manzil* (1966). The film was a hit and launched the career of music

director and composer Rahul Dev Burman. The song and dance sequences, inspired by the swing and big band music that was popular during this time, created a new trend in music and choreography. In the song and dance sequence of "O Hasina Zulfowali" (O Beautiful Woman with Tresses), Helen (the dancer mentioned before) appeared as both a blonde and a brunette. The staging in a nightclub had elaborate sets, with a sign that said "Rocky" in the backdrop. The wide range of special effects included one where Helen emerged from inside the picture of a human eye. The choreography was by Herman Benjamin, who introduced the shake, shimmy, and the twist to Bombay films. He also choreographed the song and dance sequence "Jan Pehchan Ho" (You Are Known to Me) for the film *Gumnaam* (1965), which was picked up by the Hollywood movie *Ghost World* (2001) for its opening credits and which was featured in US commercials for Heineken beer.[28] One could argue that "Mera Naam Chinchinchu" of Howrah Bridge fame inspired the swing dancing in "Jan Pehchan Ho." Overall, the films of this period, especially the song and dance sequences, depicted a dialogue between national and international music and dance practices, technologies, and visual cultures, but they were significantly different from recent Bollywood song and dance sequences.

The cinematography of *Mughal E-Azam* (1960) or *Guide* (1965) was in direct contrast to the notions of cosmopolitanism explored in films such as *Teesri Manzil*. The song and dance sequences in *Teesri Manzil* were heavily influenced by the rock and roll music of the times whereas both *Guide* and *Mughal E-Azam* drew on hybrid Indian musical traditions. *Mughal E-Azam* was based on the love between Mughal prince Jahangir and the court dancer and courtesan Anarkali. The classical romantic aesthetics of the song and dance sequences of *Mughal E-Azam* were created by the Kathak gurus Shambhu Maharaj, Lachchu Maharaj (of the Lucknow Gharana school and style), and Gopi Krishna of *Jhanak Jhanak* fame. The music compositions for the song and dance sequences drew on north Indian classical genres. The lyrics were penned by poet Shakeel Badayuni and the language in the songs was a mix of Urdu, Hindi, and Brajbhasha (a Hindi dialect spoken in north-central India). One of the famous song and dance sequences from the film, "Mohe Panghat Pe Nandalal Ched Gayo Re" (on my journey to the river, Nandalal or Krishna teases me), was rendered as a traditional *thumri* song (a style from north Indian classical genre), which is an aspect of *kathak* dance. The song and dance sequences have become classics known for their grandeur, detailed stagecraft, sets, costumes, and cinematography. The colorized version (with rather flamboyant colors) was released in 2004.

The film's use of elaborate sets echoed *Jhanak Jhanak* and *Chandralekha*, and is an aspect of Bombay film tradition inherited from Indian theatrical practices that is slowly getting eroded due to digital media in the current context, explains film director Shyam Benegal and others. A quote from the English newspaper *The Indian Express* sums up the situation:

> "Item numbers" in Bollywood films now use special effects with digital media. In this respect Akbar Khan gives the example of Hollywood film *Gladiator* where part

> of the set (such as the stadium) was manually built and part was digital computer graphics. But it was difficult to distinguish between the real and the virtual, he adds.[29]

However, many contemporary filmmakers continue to build sets to create special effects and splendor on screen, especially for the song and dance sequences, such as directors Sanjay Lila Bhansali and Ahsutosh Gowarikar. The notable films by Bansali and Gowarikar are *Devdas* (2002) and *Lagaan* (2001), respectively, both of which have many hit song and dance sequences. There were many courtesan films that followed *Mughal E-Azam*, notable among them *Pakeezah* (1972), *Umrao Jan* (1981), and *Devdas* (2002).[30]

In her analysis of Bombay films, Sumita Chakravarty discussed the genre of courtesan films to emphasize the impact of these films in constructing the narratives of Indian culture and gender identity.[31] The picturization of the dance soirées in Bombay films with chandeliers, water fountains, and arched doorways interwoven with the sounds of twinkling bells, Urdu poetry, and classical and folk melodies and accompanied by instrumentations involving *sarnegi, tabla,* and sitar constructed a particular sensibility of Indianess. In earlier films (including courtesan films), the song and dance sequences were integrated with the narrative. The song and dance sequences created a "structure of feeling" that became identified with attributes of tradition and nationhood (albeit with some departures that were interested in Western cosmopolitanism). Gopal and Moorti argue that the films that evoked a sense of tradition and nation and created a "community of sentiments" that was both Indian and vernacular.[32] I would add that it was largely thorough the aesthetics of song and dance that these "communities of sentiments" were imagined as Indian.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the song and dance sequences in Bombay films gradually were detached from the narrative of the film. The films that belonged to the action film genre used the song and dance sequences as distractions, yielding a different genre termed "cinema of interruption" by Lalitha Gopalan.[33] These were also the years when disco music, popularized by music director Bappi Lahiri, and disco dancing, popularized by actors Mithun Chakraborty and Rishi Kapoor, came to dominate song and dance sequences. In the disco genre, the lyrics became unimportant and orchestration and fusion with Western music emerged as key to a new kind of urban cosmopolitanism.

The song and dance sequence that put dance choreography on the map as a film's sure success was *Tezaab* (1987). The number "Ek Do Teen" (One, Two, Three) was a super hit with Madhuri Dixit (discussed earlier). The dance was choreographed by Saroj Khan, who was the first female dance choreographer to attain the status of male choreographers (*masterjis*) in Bombay films. The Film Fare best choreography award was invented for this film. "Ek Do Teen" opened with Madhuri Dixit dancing a folksy number with her usual *jatkas* (hip movements) and *matkas* (breast undulations that are signature moves of choreographer Saroj Khan).

*Hum Apke Hai Kaun* (*who am I to you?*) from 1994, a blockbuster film with fourteen song and dance sequences and lavish costumes and sets, set a new standard

for consumerism in song and dance sequences and films. The film was directed by Suraaj Barjatya of Rajashri Productions, a prominent production house in Bollywood. The global prominence of Bollywood as well as the transformation from Bombay to Bollywood arguably began with this film. It played in theaters for almost a year and grossed more than $30 million, a remarkable take at the time. *Hum Apke Hai Kaun* (HAHK) was choreographed by Jay Borade, who was trained in both Western and Indian classical dances (and had been an assistant of Surya Kumar, mentioned earlier). The dancing and choreography threw together an eclectic fusion of Western and Indian forms derived from the Punjabi folk dance *bhangra* with a distinct Bollywood flavor. The movie celebrated a "quintessential" notion of the Indian family and traditional family values with wedding extravaganzas at the center. It was the first Bollywood film to run in mainstream cinemas in the US, UK, and other parts of the world. It paved the path for commercial films in the overseas markets and other films followed. In these later films, the song and dance sequences were created with an eye to the box office and overseas market rather the storyline or the script. These sequences also now produced Indianess through "*bhangra*" rather than classical Indian forms.[34] The films created a new ethos of consumerism in Bollywood films.

Moreover, the trends initiated by *Hum Apke Hai Kaun* coincided with Bollywood establishing itself as a major entertainment industry and spreading globally as an industry. Shuddhabrata Sengupta observes "a new aesthetic filtered via music television entered Hindi cinema in the early to mid-nineties."[35] The remixing of traditional or old Bombay film music in new packages was gaining popularity. The song and dance sequences that were depicted in exotic locales with hi-tech cinematography claimed a separate life from the actual film, such as the number "Chaiya Chaiya" from the 1998 film *Dil Se* (From the Heart). This song and dance sequence brought the concept of the "item girl" (which means an overly sexualized dancing girl) to the forefront. The dancing on top of a moving train in "Chaiya Chaiya" surrounded by nature, as well as the Rajasthani costumes, the Rajasthani folk-inspired dancing, and the catchy music by A.R Rahman, made the sequence a memorable one. The lyrics by Gulzar were based on a traditional Sufi song by Bulleh Shah. The visualization of the music was so compelling that it wedded the cinematography indelibly to the song and helped create a new visual music genre. "Chaiya Chaiya" marked the arrival of the Indian music video with particularly jerky camera work, rapid editing technique, vivid colors, and high-end, digitally produced images. It also put A.R Rahman on the map of Indian music for ushering in a new kind of contemporary Indian musical. The choreography by Farah Khan, who was an assistant to choreographer Saroj Khan, also put her on the map and she won the best choreographer's award for the film. The music video of "Chaiya Chaiya" became a global hit.

The interdependent relationship between Bollywood song and dance sequences and the music video market established a new global market niche for the Bollywood industry. Its spread was propelled by remix hits like the controversial video "Kata Laga" by DJ Doll. The video created a controversy about censorship and women's sexuality, not unlike the song and dance sequence "Choli Ke Piche Kya Hai" in the film *Khalnayak*

(1993). The idea of remix, which was not confined to music videos but also in the use of language, such as the mix of Hindi and English (Hinglish), ushered in a new urban cultural phenomenon in the Indian disapora.[36] The trendy pop remix genre celebrated being South Asian and international at the same time in cities such as London and Birmingham.[37] The popularity of the remix videos showed that the "item number" was going to be the engine of Bollywood films in the twenty-first century. The "item number" was generally danced by "item girls" who were no longer the vamps of past Bombay films but often the main female protagonists, or by some glamorous and established film star who appeared as a guest performer. The success of the "item girl" led to the creation of the "item boy" in films such as *Delhi Belly* (2011).

The "item number" in Bollywood films came to function like music videos with eclectic styles of dancing and music but packaged with a particular "remix" aesthetics associated with commodities and advertising. They now have a life of their own. They are released many months before the film is released. They appear in television programs and circulate on video, cable, DVD, and the Internet. In fact, the popularity of a song and dance sequence now determines the box-office success of the film. Anustup Basu contends that the song and dance sequences operate like "designer products that can invoke bodies, spaces, and objects that can arrive from any visual universe."[38] The main thrust is to produce a visual that juxtaposes a variety of sexual, exotic, and rapidly moving images.

The conflation of Indian culture with Bollywood song and dance sequences is now ubiquitous. Ashish Rajadhyaksha observes that "the dominance of Bollywood cinema, over all other aspects of cultural production deemed Indian, especially music, dance, and fashion, is particularly significant, and linked to a 'cultural conglomeration' involving a range of distribution and consumption activities from websites to music cassettes, from cable to radio."[39] Moreover, the dramatic expansion of television since the early 2000s, along with the emergence of cable networks such as Zee, Sony, and Star, provide publicity engines for the rhizomatic circulation of Bollywood films, especially through the song and dance sequences and "item numbers."[40] Online video platforms such as YouTube, which promote song and dance sequences or "item numbers," further enhance this process. In fact, the dance television reality shows are venues to present the "item numbers" on all kinds of electronic media. In the process, it brings the Bollywood industry even closer to the common audience, not just as passive audience members but also as active participants in the making of a transnational celebrity culture.

## Reality TV

There are many accounts of upward mobility in the lower middle and working classes of contemporary India. Dance is both an account of and a vehicle for class mobility. The new media and the prominence of Bollywood have created a new awareness and

popularity of dance in India. New media and Bollywood have broadened the audience for dance as well as opened up new opportunities for new classes and generations who can dream of pursuing careers as dancers and choreographers that were previously reserved for the educated elite or hereditary dance families. The dance reality world is a world of such aspirations and desires.[41]

As dance and music reality shows have exploded on television, dance studios and dance spaces have mushroomed in cities such as Kolkata and Bombay. The dance reality show "Dhum Machale" on the television channel ETV Bangla provides an example of this discursive space for the construction of new modes of dances that embody new desires of the aspirational Indian connected to consumption and markets. I will now explore this Bollywood-derived new aesthetics of "remix" as showcased in dance reality shows.

ETV is a Bengali language regional television channel based in Kolkata. The show *Dhum Machale* (the title references the megahit Bollywood film *Dhoom,* which also had two sequels) was launched on this channel in 2008 and continued through 2009, airing during prime time three times a week. It was designed to be a concoction of humor, dance, emotional drama, and artistic talent. The staging of the show was set up like a Bollywood staged dance event with strobe and technicolored lighting. The backdrop used elaborate lighting and set designs to create the gaudy visual extravaganza of Bollywood. The costumes were wide-ranging, as was the dancing. The music was generally film-inspired and the songs were in either Bengali or Hindi. The presentations were short and concise, and followed the format of reality shows such as *American Idol* or *So You Think You Can Dance.* A panel of celebrity judges sat on one side of the stage, two of them well-known choreographers in the city and the third a film director. Each contestant, who was selected after many rounds of audition, was assigned a choreographer and was provided with backup dancers for performing the pieces. Before each dance sequence, the dancer and her choreographer were introduced by the host. They walked in side by side, holding hands, to the applause of a live audience. Then the camera cut to the dance sequence with the spotlight on the dancer. Between the numbers were interludes in which one or two co-hosts provided comic relief, often creating a comic super-text that ran counter to the dance narrative on stage.

*Dhum Machale* arguably created a polysemy of intertextual experiences that triggered competing emotions. The sense of time and space was multidimensional, since the show was not live, but pretended to be. The television screen was just one of the frames through which the audience watched. The other frame was the actual stage in the television studio. On that stage, the emotional experience for the viewer ranged from being obviously contrived to being utterly spontaneous. And the most commonly contrived emotion was the collective experience of loss felt by the audience and performers alike during the elimination rounds. Desire, aspiration, and success were the key emotions of this show.

The contestants came mostly from middle- and lower middle-class backgrounds and spoke about their aspirations of becoming famous and successful. This kind of aspirational desire forms the larger emotional landscape for the new Indian youth in the

market-driven economy.[42] The "remix" aesthetics of the realty show expressed similar commodified desires associated with aspirational desires. Bollywood dance practice and its derivative versions showcased in the television reality show genre are potent engines for producing this new kind of desire and aspiration. A new kind of fleeting emotion and marketed reality dominate the sensory world of the audience and the performer with captivating auras of success and celebrity. Dance reality shows are at the heart of these emotional dramas, which are in turn simultaneously contrived, real, and sites where pleasures of dancing are transformed into digitized emotions of winning and losing, guided by the promise of transformation. They create new visibility for aspiring dancers and choreographers and provide them with a new kind of media citizenry. Novel desires and aspirations molded through these dance performances on television reality shows, I argue, are an aspect of "Bollywoodization" of culture that celebrate the aesthetics of the "remix."

## Conclusion

I have argued that dance reality TV has evolved from the same scopic landscape of India as Bombay films, where traditional dance forms (reinvented as classical and folk during Indian nationalism) continue to renegotiate new technology, economy, and consumer culture. The screen dances of Bombay cinema/Bollywood have played a significant role in shifting the aesthetics of desire from a tradition-inspired mythopoetic context to a new aesthetic of commodity and consumption. Expressed usually through the narrative of romance heightened in the song and dance sequences, representations of the erotic in Hindi films had earlier drawn mostly from classical and folks dance forms. But now the emotive classical dance aesthetics are relics of the past. The hybrid dance fusions that dominate the song and dances today are inspired by commodity aesthetics driven by markets and consumption. I have argued that this aesthetic transition—driven by technology, liberalization, and globalization—is articulated through the term "remix." I have shown how the remix genre gave birth to the "item number" and "item girl" in Bollywood films. I have also shown how the music video industry and television reality shows became media outlets for circulating the song and dance remixes, and in turn provided opportunities for underprivileged youth by inviting them to participate in various dance contexts such as reality television shows.[43] The search for an aesthetic modernity in India is the story of the recontexualization of "desire" and the "desiring subject." Screendances from Bombay/Bollywood films to reality shows provide an exploratory lens.

## Notes

1. See Asish Nandy, *The Secret Politics of Our Desire* (London: Zed, 1998) and Ravi Vasudevan, ed., *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

2. Christopher Pinney, who has written widely on India's popular visual culture, has described the interrelated visual rubric of chromolithographs, paintings, photographs, and cinema as an "interocular field." I argue that the song and dance sequences and reality television shows are aspects of the same. See Christopher Pinney, "The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Or, What Happens when Peasants 'Get Hold' of Images," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on a New Terrain*, eds. Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abhu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 355–369.
3. See Raminder Kaur and Ajay J. Sinha, eds., *Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005).
4. See Christian Metz, *Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Ben Brewster (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) and Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.
5. Bhakti is a religious movement that swept across medieval India that literally means devotion or to partake in devotion with intense love for god. Sufi is a mystical movement in Islam that was popularized in India by the Chisti Sufi order started by Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti.
6. *Bhakti* and *sringara rasa* are aspects of *rasa* theory. They are connected to Indian aesthetic emotions which include the performing arts, visual arts, and poetry. *Rasas* are aesthetic emotions and there are nine specific emotions.
7. Pallabi Chakravorty, "Moved to Dance: Bhakti, Commodity, and a New India," *Visual Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (April 2009): 211–222.
8. Vamps were Westernized sexualized women in Hindi films, who were usually night club dancers and singers. But they have vanished in postliberalization India and heroines and "item girls" have taken their place.
9. The romantic mythopoetic aesthetics of the classical and folk genres represented in the song and dance sequences of the Bombay films of the 1950s and 1960s (and some select films of later years) are associated with what film historians call the golden age of Indian films. These story lines were idealistic and full of the hope that reflected the socialistic values of a newly independent India.
10. Wolfgang Haug, *Commodity Aesthetics, Ideology and Culture*, trans. Karen Kramer and Susan Taylor Brown (Amsterdam: International General, 1987).
11. William Mazarella, *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
12. Daya Kishan Thussu, "The Globalization of 'Bollywood': The Hype and Hope," in *Global Bollywood*, eds. Aswin Punathambekar and Anandam P. Kavoori (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 17–40.
13. See Pallabi Chakravorty, "Hegemony, Dance and Nation: The Construction of the Classical Dance in India" *South Asia* 21, no. 2 (1998): 107–120, and Uttara A. Coorlawala, "The Sanskritized Body," *Dance Research Journal* 36, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 50–63.
14. Govind Nihalani Gulzara and Saibal Chaterjee, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema* (Delhi: Popular Prakashan, 2004), 13.
15. Natyashastra is a treatise on performing arts dating back to 200 BCE and 200 CE, presumably written by the sage Bharata.
16. See Kathryn Hansen, "*The Indar Sabha* Phenomenon: Public Theatre and Consumption in Greater India," in *Pleasure and The Nation*, eds. Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney (School of Oriental and African Studies South Asia Series. Delhi: Oxford University Press,

2003) and Somanatha Gupta, *The Parsi Theatre: Its Origins and Development*, trans. and ed. Kathryn Hansen (Kolkata, India: Seagull, 2005).

17. Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti, eds., *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
18. See Sangita Shreshtova, *Is It All About Hips? Around the World with Bollywood Dance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011) on the peculiar circulation of Bollywood dance from stage to screen and back to stage.
19. K.N. Dandayudapani. *Indian Talkie (1931–56): Silver Jubilee Souvenir* (Bombay: Film Federation of India, 1956).
20. Gopal and Moorti eds., *Global Bollywood*, 20.
21. Baburao Patel, "'Kalpana' Is an Artist's Dream in Celluloid," *Film India* (October 1948): 50.
22. *Ibid.*, 50.
23. Gopal and Moorti eds., *Global Bollywood*, 26.
24. Gopi Krishna was born into a family of *kathak* dancers; his sister is the famous *kathak* dancer Sitara Devi.
25. Christopher Pinney, "The Nation (Un)Pictured? Chromolithography and 'Popular' Politics in India, 1878–1995," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 4 (1997): 834–67.
26. Rosie Thomas, "Not Quite (Pearl): Fearless Nadia, Queen of the Stunts," in *Bollywood: Popular India Cinema through a Transnational Lens*, eds. R. Kaur and A.J. Jain (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), 35–69.
27. Thomas, *Fearless Nadia*, 35–69.
28. See Trivia Time #33 http://memsaabstory.com/2008/12/14/trivia-time-33/.
29. "Is it Sunset for Bollywood's Magnificent 'Sets'?," *The Indian Express* (July 17, 2011), http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/is-it-sunset-for-bollywoods-magnificent-sets-/818690/0.
30. There were two other *Devdas* made before this, in 1955 by Bimol Roy, and in 1935 by P.C Barua. The most recent version is called *Dev.D*, released in 2009.
31. Sumita S. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947-1987* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).
32. Gopal and Moorti eds., *Global Bollywood*, 22.
33. Lalitha Gopalan, *Cinema of Interruptions: Action Genres in Contemporary Indian Cinema* (London and Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).
34. See Anjali G Roy, "Is Everybody Saying 'Shava Shava' to Bollywood Bhangra?" in *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation, and Diaspora*, eds. Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Rejeshwari V. Pandharipande (New York: Anthem, 2010), 35–50.
35. Shuddhabrata Sengupta,"Reflected Readings in Available Light: Cameramen in the Shadows of Hindi Cinema, in *Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens*," eds. Raminder Kaur and Ajay J. Sinha (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), 118–140.
36. A. Vishnu, "Age of 'Hinglish' Remixes," *The Hindu*, August 6, 2003, http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/mp/2003/08/06/stories/2003080600090300.htm.
37. Sean Couglan, "It's Hinglish, Innit?," *BBC News* Magazine, February 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/6122072.stm. Also see Ann R. David, "Dancing the Diasporic Dream? Embodied Desires and the Changing Audiences for Bollywood Film Dance, "*Participations* 7, no. 2 (2010): 215–225.
38. Anustup Basu, "The Music of Intolerable Love: Political Conjugality and *Dile Se*," in *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, eds. Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 153–176.

39. Asish Rajadhyaksha, "The 'Bollywoodization' of the Indian Cinema: Cultural Nationalism in a Global Arena," in *Global Bollywood*, eds. Aswin Punathambekar and Anandam P. Kavoori (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 17–40.
40. Daya Kishan Thussu, "The Globalization of 'Bollywood': The Hype and Hope," in *Global Bollywood*, eds. Aswin Punathambekar and Anandam P. Kavoori (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 97–113.
41. Pallabi Chakravorty, "Global Dancing in Kolkata," in *A Companion to the Anthropology of India*, ed. Isabelle Clark-Deces (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 137–153.
42. Ruchira Ganguly-Scrase and Timothy J. Scrase, *Globalisation and the Middle Classes in India* (London: Routledge, 2009).
43. However, these opportunities have also given rise to debates on sexuality and morality and seen by many as exploitative engines of the neoliberal economy leading to excessive desire.

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